

CONNECT

Winter 2026



BUILDING TOGETHER

As we prepare to celebrate 40 years, we're highlighting partnerships that have shaped our journey and continue to evolve.

Preschoolers pile on Andrea Weidner at Little Explorers Child Care in Ghent. Owner Jamie Gillund received a Bright Beginnings Loan from SWIF to help start this business and is in the process of opening a second location.



SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE
FOUNDATION

Building Together: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE



We are proud to be a community foundation rooted in Southwest Minnesota, the place we love and call home. Since our founding in 1986, our work has centered on what rural communities can achieve when connected and supported. Stories in this issue showcase some of those achievements, made possible by working together.

Southwest Initiative Foundation came from a belief in the power of rural communities to grow, adapt, and thrive. Today, that belief is stronger than ever as we approach the work with new strategic priorities. They reflect our core strengths, providing direction and renewed momentum toward our vision of a region where all people thrive.

Boosting economic mobility through small businesses loans, offering technical assistance to small business owners and entrepreneurs, and collaborating with communities to ensure they have access to quality, affordable child care.

Building communities by offering leadership development, supporting local nonprofits, and sponsoring events and initiatives that promote belonging and wellbeing.

Retaining wealth locally by partnering with our community foundation affiliates and designated funds to keep dollars in communities, making grants to support projects that build resilient communities, and offering flexible and creative ways for donors to support our mission or another local cause.

WE'RE TURNING

WE'LL BE HOSTING CELEBRATIONS AND SHARING STORIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. SIGN UP FOR OUR E-NEWS AT swifoundation.org TO GET INVITES AND STAY UP-TO-DATE.

Resilient communities need new volunteers to keep good ideas going

When it comes to the tiny town of Porter, you need a reason to be there otherwise “you’re not liable to know where it is.”

That’s how Dan Dybsetter describes the hamlet of 162 people that sits on the border of Yellow Medicine and Lincoln counties. Porter has been home for Dan’s whole life, except college and serving a draft tour in Vietnam.

Nestled in the center of town is the Porter Cafe. It’s been serving hot meals and friendly hellos since it opened in 1988.

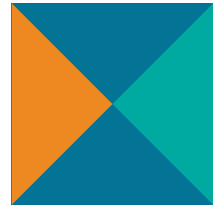
Dan was part of the group that founded the cafe. The building and all its fixtures are owned and maintained by the nonprofit Porter Development Company. A manager rents the building at a subsidized rate and runs the restaurant. It offers congregate senior dining and a place to meet and greet neighbors.

While the cafe is absolutely a success story, it’s a gritty one.

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Brothers Dave (left) and Dan Dybsetter have a cup of coffee in the Porter Community Cafe both have helped steward as a community gathering spot.





Many volunteers donated the labor to build the Porter Community Cafe.

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“It has been a struggle every year all the way, but it’s still going,” Dan said.

Creative problem solving

To set the scene, it was the early ‘80s. Porter’s last cafe and its grocery store had closed. Residents were restless for somewhere to gather and connect, not to mention get a loaf of bread.

A group of five people, including Dan, started brainstorming. Drawing on examples from other small towns they visited including Cyrus and Holloway, they

decided to build a cafe for the community, then find someone to run it.

Concept in hand, they approached the brand-new Southwest Minnesota Initiative Fund, what would become Southwest Initiative Foundation. The fund’s office was in the Volstead House at Granite Falls at the time, and the five board members from Porter traveled the short distance to request grant funds for their idea. That first attempt failed. Back at the drawing board, Dan narrowed his request.

“We focused on the senior citizens, older folks in the community who didn’t drive much or a

lot. What we’d like to have is a place they could gather,” Dan said.

The revised request was “To build a facility to house a community meeting room, a convenience grocery store and small cafe, as these services are not available and many of the senior citizens do not have transportation to access services elsewhere.” SWIF granted \$15,000 to the project. Along with a grant from what was then the Otto Bremer Foundation, donations from all the local civic groups, and gifts from going door-to-door, Porter Cafe was on its way from idea to reality.

By the work of their hands

The city of Porter donated the property for the new cafe building. One of the community members did some drafting, so he drew a basic design. The local electrician did wiring for the cost of materials. And there was a carpenter in the group, too.

“We didn’t spend much money on labor. We had people come in and help,” Dan said. “It’s literally a pole building. We know how to build pole buildings: It’s a bunch of farmers. Our goal from day one was to get a building built so it wasn’t going to require tons of maintenance.”

With the space finished, the nonprofit bought everything needed to run a restaurant business: a range for the kitchen, sinks, dishes, tables, chairs. Then they went in search of someone to run the business.

Several people were interested in running the Porter Cafe. It was a big lift, because the manager must come up with the capital to buy the inventory. The original cafe included a grocery store, which meant even more items to stock.

“We’ve had a lot of people come in and think they’re going to make a lot of money because they’re in

FUN 40TH FACT

The Southwest Minnesota Initiative Fund, the original name for SWIF, distributed grants totaling over \$300,000 and loans totaling over \$180,000 in its first year. As of our last annual report, we’ve distributed \$62.5 million in loans and \$58.7 million in grants.

business for themselves. They quickly learned Econ 101,” Dan said. “We had several different people try it and didn’t work out.”

There have been a couple decade-long managers in the cafe’s history. Current manager Doug Coil has been running the cafe since 2023.

A menu for everyone + meals for seniors

At the Porter Cafe, food arrives at the table on vintage patterned plates, and coffee comes in mismatched mugs. The menu is full of staples

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The nonprofit bought everything needed to run a restaurant business: a range for the kitchen, sinks, dishes, tables, chairs.

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for the meat-and-potatoes crowd: beef stew, pulled pork, burgers, chicken pot pie, scalloped potatoes and ham, just to name a few. And no cafe would be complete without pie and soup.

While the grocery store is no longer part of the business, the senior dining option that helped launch the cafe in the first place remains. It's part of the Senior Nutrition Program that includes dining sites for older adults and home-delivered meals in communities throughout Minnesota.

People age 60 or older can participate in the Senior Nutrition Program, and their spouses can also participate, even if they are under 60. Prairie Five Community Action oversees the site in Porter.

"When this started, they all would come and were served in the back room. There would be 10 or 15 people that were there, with cars lined up on Main Street. That's one of the things that really helped us," Dan said.

In Lincoln County alone, 24 percent of the population is 65 or better. As part of the Age Friendly Communities project through SWIF, the cafe added a covered entrance to improve access.

What the future holds

When Porter Cafe got up and running all those years ago, Dan remembers thinking 5 or 10 years in business would be a success. By that measure, the group has more than succeeded.

"When we think about resilient communities, the Porter Cafe is such a strong example," said SWIF President Scott Marquardt. "The volunteers are perpetuating a sense of community by continuing to show up, even through the challenges. Being willing to try new things, learn new things, and give it everything they've got has kept the doors open over the years."

Keeping things running includes fundraising and an annual meeting for the nonprofit Porter Development Company. Recruiting new board members and engaging new donors has proved challenging. On occasion, board members have put up personal money for urgent repairs or other needs.

"This has always been there, so the younger generation takes it for granted. When we have a meeting every year, we get hardly anyone coming to the meeting. Going forward that will



Dedicated volunteers have kept the cafe running so diners can still enjoy a hot meal there today.



The cafe's sign gives a nod to all the investments in time, talent, and treasure that have made it what it is today.



The cafe feels like a hometown spot thanks to touches like mismatched coffee cups.

probably be an issue," Dan said. "The few times that the business has been closed, there's not a car on the street in town. If you don't have a car on the street when you go through town, you don't have much of a community anymore."

Dan's brother, Dave Dybsetter, recently finished 10 years of volunteer board service for the cafe's nonprofit. Dave chose a different path from Dan, taking his speech communication degree from Southwest Minnesota State University and heading to Minneapolis to start a career. But Dave's path led him back to Porter eventually. He's now largely retired but helps his nephew and brother run the Dybsetter family farm.

Dave believes firmly in community, and in the commitment it takes to maintain. When he was a school board member, he missed only three meetings in more than 12 years.

"I think everybody should take their turn. It won't always be here unless people continue to work toward it," Dave said. "I think if you're going to be part of a community, you need to be involved in it."

"These are the kind of places that keep your community alive. You can't discover that after it's gone because once it's gone you can't get it back. That's why we've worked so hard to keep this going," Dave said.

Rural child care center *a dream come true*



Jamie Gillund opened Little Explorers Child Care Center in Ghent to follow her dreams and support area families and businesses.

Running a successful child care business takes a mix of empathy, technical skills, and community support. Plus, a great team. Jamie Gillund has it all at Little Explorers Child Care Center in Ghent. It was her lifelong dream to open this business, and soon she'll be opening a second location.

"We have such a great reputation and a long waiting list because we truly care for the children like our own. I found amazing staff that believe in the same things I do: Children need to play to learn, and safety and love and care comes first," Jamie said.

A mom of five herself, Jamie deeply values family and has had a lifelong passion for taking care of children. After earning an early childhood education degree from Southwest Minnesota State University, she spent 17 years as a family-based child care provider.

From home to center

"I really enjoyed doing home daycare, but I love the center environment so much more, being able to collaborate and work together," Jamie said. "When I did home daycare, it was a lot more difficult to do the curriculum activities I wanted to, because you have all the variety of age groups."

In the summer of 2020, she decided it was time to pursue her dream. SWIF's Bright Beginnings Loan Program helped her open the doors to Little Explorers Child Care Center.

"SWIF has been amazing. It was a huge change for me to go from a home daycare to an actual business, employing staff. When I first started, SWIF helped us with getting a low interest loan, so we could get some items that we needed for the center, and they covered a lot of the trainings for starting the center," Jamie said.

Continuing to grow

Jamie and her staff still benefit from SWIF support through the annual Kids First Conference, which the foundation sponsors. Little Explorers closes one day a year to attend the conference.

"All my full-time staff go to it, and it's their favorite training of the year. We have so much team bonding. We have time to concentrate on ourselves, and what we want to do to make the center better as a team," Jamie said.

Even with a licensed capacity of 62, Jamie hasn't been able to offer spots for all the kids who need them. With strong community support and a great team, she decided to expand. Later this year, Little Explorers will open a location in nearby Minneota.

Construction is well under way, and Jamie hopes to open the new center in late summer.

"Part of the reason we decided to open the second center is the amount of families I had contacting me, moms calling, crying because they didn't want to lose their jobs but they have nowhere to send their infants," Jamie said. "Obviously, we need child care. There's no way around it. Child care is vital to Minnesota, to this area, to everything."



Preschoolers get their hands on items in a sensory bin at Little Explorers Child Care.

Get involved

SWIF helps fund community planning, public policy, project investment and technical assistance, public relations and appreciation, and professional development for child care. Be part of the solution by making a gift to our mission. Visit swifoundation.org/donate to give.

FUN 40TH FACT

In 2014, First Children's Finance launched Greater Than Minnesota with the Minnesota Initiative Foundations, including SWIF. The program helped assess and address rural child care challenges region by region. It evolved into the Rural Child Care Innovation Program, which we still partner on today.



FUN 40TH FACT

Kevin TeBeest participated in SWIF's Connected Communities Partnership pilot in 2007. Designed to develop and enhance leadership in our region, it was later incorporated into various areas of our work rather than serving as a stand-alone program. Pilot partners were Montevideo and New London.

Kevin TeBeest of Montevideo has witnessed the many ways SWIF has an impact in local communities.

Small gifts can grow GREAT THINGS

Kevin TeBeest is linked to Southwest Initiative Foundation in about as many ways as one person can be: He's a loan client, a former board member for our community foundation partner, a past SWIF program participant, and a donor to our funds.

"I've seen, very uniquely, the many ways that SWIF is connected. Part of the foundation's value is just getting people to communicate with each other," Kevin said. "I think the hardest thing for small towns is to lose their

identity, and yet we also have to cooperate with our neighbors. Sometimes we need help to mediate that, and to make that work."

Kevin and his wife, Judy, were both born and raised in Montevideo and graduated from Montevideo High School. Kevin received his degree in mortuary science from the University of Minnesota in 1985 and worked in Thief River Falls for 7 years before joining Anderson Funeral Home in 1992.

Now he operates funeral homes in Appleton, Benson, Dawson, Granite Falls, and

Montevideo. A loan from SWIF helped finance the purchase of the Benson location. The funeral business is a family affair for TeBeests, with Judy and the couple's two sons Kyle and Kurt on staff, as well as Kyle's wife, Camille.

An active chamber member, founding member and ongoing volunteer with the Chippewa Valley Youth Club, and former Montevideo Area Community Foundation advisory board member -- among other community commitments -- Kevin is a big believer in giving back.

"My dad grew up in a very poor family, an only child. There was a funeral director in Watertown, South Dakota, that told school counselors, 'You know, if there are kids that should go to school that can't, call me,'" Kevin said. "So my dad was one of Joe Messer's boys. And Joe helped him go to Northern (State University) to become a schoolteacher."

That giving spirit got passed down to Kevin, along with values of volunteering, community, and civic engagement he picked up as a Boy Scout. For Kevin, generosity is about recognizing the resources everyone has.

"There's time, treasure, and talent. You have wealth. You have the ability to do great things without having great amounts of money," Kevin said.

No matter the size of the gift, Kevin emphasized that it can grow as part of a local community

foundation endowment, where the original dollars are never spent but instead invested to grow and strengthen the community for the long term.

"People don't always realize they have something to give. A gift can even come from a life insurance policy, or other assets. And it can be small. There are ways that you can just spend a little and still see the benefit in your community," Kevin said.

MORE FROM MONTEVIDEO

The Montevideo Area Community Foundation has awarded more than \$250,000 in grants to a wide variety of local organizations and projects since its founding. Looking ahead, the Montevideo Area Community Foundation is partnering with the City of Montevideo to build a new splash pad.

"Projects that benefit the whole community are a natural fit for foundation fundraising efforts," said board chair John Skoglund.

Read highlights from our community foundation partners at swifoundation.org/news.



Current Montevideo Area Community Foundation Advisory Board Members host a local fundraiser.



**SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE
FOUNDATION**

15 3rd Avenue NW
Hutchinson, MN 55350

2nd Annual Navigating the Currents, Charting the Course Conference



Southwest Minnesota nonprofit professionals and our fund partner advisory board members are invited to join us on April 15 at Jackpot Junction for a day of learning and connection. **New this year!**

Distinct tracks for nonprofit professionals and volunteer

advisory board members so that both audiences leave with new skills and knowledge to help them in their unique roles.

Visit swifoundation.org for details and registration.

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